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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a cultural/historical interpretation of "The Education of Little Tree," a children's book by the late Forrest Carter. The 1976 book, which sold over 700,000 copies and was widely used in classrooms to present Native American values and lifestyles, is the story of an orphaned boy named Little Tree, raised by his Cherokee grandparents in the Tennessee mountains during the Depression. Because the book's cover carried the subtitle "A True Story by Forrest Carter," critics charge that the author presented the book as an autobiography and true representation of Native American culture. In 1991, Forrest Carter was exposed as the late Asa Earl Carter, a Ku Klux Klan terrorist and right-wing radio announcer. The revelations caused an upheaval among readers and proponents of Carter's work. This paper suggests that Carter's representation of the book as a "true story" simply reflects a cultural tradition of storytelling in the South and that the author did not intend to misrepresent his work. For example, it is apparent that the Native American themes in the book are not the "truth" and are simply added to make the story more interesting. Carter's story does not accurately reflect Cherokee beliefs about creation and the natural order, nor their hunting, farming, and social practices. Although Carter's themes are more representative of Appalachian culture than Cherokee culture, the "truth" in the story is that Carter is portraying his own beliefs and experiences. What Carter has done is give the reader his philosophy on the three relationships that every person will encounter in life: spiritual, human, and environmental. The controversy over this book results from a failure to understand the culture of the author. This book is indeed a "true story" in the Southern sense of the phrase, and Forrest/Asa Earl Carter is indeed a true storyteller. (LP)

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"Now, This is a True Story."

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Thus is a cultural/historical interpretation of *The Education of Little Tree* by the late Forrest Carter which proposes that the author did not intend to misrepresent himself as Native American and that there is nothing contradictory between the book and the author's controversial past.

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"Now, This is a True Story."

Recently I read an article entitled "'Authenticity,' or the Lesson of Little Tree" in which Henry Louis Gates Jr. investigates the role of authorial authenticity in writing, giving several examples of works that portray characters or lifestyles that are ethnically or sexually different from those of the authors. However, I was interested in the article not because of the authenticity issue but because one of the texts which Gates used as an example, *The Education of Little Tree*, had been interpreted to have purpose and meaning quite different from what I understood them to be: Many believed that the book was "a unique vision of Native American culture" (Gates 26). This idea was in fact different from anything I had ever heard about the book.

The Education of Little Tree, written by Forrest Carter, was originally published by Delacorte Press in 1976. Since its republication by the University of New Mexico Press in 1986, it has won awards from the American Booksellers Association for being the most enjoyable book to "hand-sell" (Education 104), been converted to a screenplay which Robert Redford intends to direct, and sold more than 700,000 copies (Redford 30). The book is a story of a small, orphaned boy, Little Tree, who is raised by his Cherokee grandparents in the mountains of Tennessee during the Depression. According to Gates and others, the book was taken as an autobiography. Further, it was hailed as a representation of Native American culture, sold in Indian

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reservation gift shops, and used by public school teachers across the nation because it offered a "unique opportunity for... students to understand the lifestyles and values of our earliest Americans..., values that are specifically Indian" (Stensland 2-8).

The reason, however, that Gates included *The Education of Little Tree* in his article on authorial authenticity is that there is a question about Forrest Carter's authenticity as a Native American writer. In 1991, Dan T. Carter, a history professor at Emory University, exposed "Forrest Carter" as a pseudonym of the late Asa Earl Carter, whom Professor Carter describes as a one-eighth Indian, semi-rural, non-orphaned (Reid 18) "Alabama native" who between 1946 and 1973 "carved out a violent career in Southern politics as a Ku Klux Klan terrorist, right-wing radio announcer, home-grown American fascist and anti-Semite, rabble-rousing demagogue and secret author of the famous 1963 speech by Gov. George Wallace of Alabama: 'Segregation now... Segregation tomorrow... Segregation forever'" (Carter, D.). Asa Carter is also known for organizing and commanding The Original Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy, whose militant members are infamous for participating in the 1956 riot resulting from a Black female's attempt to enroll at the University of Alabama, assaulting Nat King Cole during a 1956 concert in Birmingham, Alabama for being a "vicious agitator for integration," and castrating a Black man during an initiation ceremony in 1957 (Newton 445). Although Forrest Carter denied being Asa Earl

Carter, in 1991, eleven years after her husband's death, Carter's widow, India Carter, admitted that he was indeed Asa Earl Carter, saying that he took the name when his first novel, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, was published in the mid-seventies (Reid 16).

These revelations about Forrest Carter's former life, of course, have caused an upheaval among the readers and proponents of Carter's works, an upheaval that has caused many to rethink their willingness to accept the written word as truth or even representative of truth. Yet, the process of acceptance, revelation and disappointment that many readers went through with *The Education of Little Tree* was unnecessary and could have been avoided if these readers had bothered to investigate and question the text and the author's culture.

It must be noted here that I am Southern. Even more, I am from the rural South. I was born in Washington County, Mississippi and graduated from high school in Madison County, Georgia. Between these times, I lived in North Carolina and Texas. My father's family is from Arkansas and now lives in Alabama. My mother is from Louisiana. Although I would never claim to be familiar with all the subtle variations in Southern tradition and culture, I do have an understanding of what it is to be Southern. It is this, I believe, that allows me to understand Forrest Carter's true purpose in writing *The Education of Little Tree*, and it is this, when I read Gates' essay, that caused me to be shocked not at the discovery of Forrest Carter's true identity -- his ideas are not uncommon in the South -- but

at the idea that his book was viewed as a representation of Native American culture.

The trouble with *The Education of Little Tree* stems from the idea that the book is non-fiction/autobiographical. Indeed, printed on the front cover is "A True Story By Forrest Carter," and the concept of "true story" seems to be the root of all the confusion surrounding the book and its author, one's interpretation of the text corresponding to the meaning one attaches to the word *story*. By dictionary definition, a story can be anything from a historical recounting of events to an outright lie, and it is logical, when *true* and *story* are attached, to presume the historical definition. This, however, is a mistake. What Carter implies by combining the words *true* and *story* is much more cultural.

In the South there is a very old and well respected tradition of storytelling, and it is common for the conversation of any group of Southerners, from the pulpit and political platform to the front porch, to revolve around stories, "One time...," "Back when..." and "I knew this guy once..." being some of the common beginnings to tall tales, jokes, and lies. However, there is one type of story that begins differently. It is a story that contains what the narrator considers to be a profound truth, a truth that his audience needs to hear, to know, in order to live a full and meaningful life. This type of story does not evoke laughter, although it may be humorous; it does not evoke fear, although it may be terrifying; and it does not induce

conversation. The fitting response is silent reflection, at least until the mood gets heavy enough that someone changes the subject. This is what is known as a "true story."

It must be made clear, however, that when the narrator begins by saying "Now, this is a *true story*...," and the crowd quiets, the audience is not expecting an objective, historical presentation -- far from it. This would be much too boring. What is expected is a gripping, suspenseful oration that has in it, somewhere, a truth. In other words, the audience expects the speaker to use narrative license and "spice up" otherwise boring, although useful, information. Thus, the words *true* and *story* in the Southerner's "true story" are oxymoronic equivalents. Truth must be present in some form, and the appropriate "spice" must be used.

A simple analogy to this idea of the Southern "true story" is the familiar Tootsie Pop. One could simply be given a Tootsie Roll (a truth), and it would be enjoyable. But, the Southern storyteller knows that if a Tootsie Roll is put on a stick and coated with the appropriate flavor of candy, a flavor the receiver likes, the process of eating it will last longer, taste better, and simply be more enjoyable. The end, however, is the same: the Tootsie Roll is consumed.

With the Southern idea of a "true story" in mind, there is little doubt why I, as well as the other Southerners with whom I have discussed *The Education of Little Tree*, would have a different interpretation of Forrest Carter's "true story" than

those who are not familiar with Southern culture. I expected Carter to use his narrative license, and it is clear to me that he did. Knowing this, it is only logical now to ask what the "truth" of the story is. In the remainder of this essay I will address this question.

From the beginning, to anyone with a basic idea of Cherokee tradition, it is clear that the Native American themes in *The Education of Little Tree* are not the "truth." As Michael Marker points out, "The Indian stuff is plugged into the story in a completely superficial fashion" (Marker 226). If one were to do even a small amount of research, serious discrepancies would be found.

One of the first Native American aspects of the story is the introduction of words that Carter implies are Cherokee or Tsalagi, the language of the Cherokee (Kilpatrik 23). Although Tsalagi-English dictionaries are difficult to find -- there is not one in the library I use -- it is not difficult to find basic rules about the Tsalagi language, and to determine that the words Carter uses in *The Education of Little Tree* are unidentifiable as Tsalagi or do not conform to Tsalagi syllabication patterns.

The "Cherokee" word most often used by Carter is *Mon-o-lah*, which is his name for the Earth Mother. However, the traditional Cherokee Earth Mother, who was the first woman, is *Se-lu*, the Tsalagi word for maize (McLoughlin 17). Other similar ideas represented by Tsalagi words also do not correspond to *Mon-o-lah*: *e-lo-hi* (earth), *a-ge-hyv* (women), *e-tsi* (mother), *e-qua* (great),

u-ne-la-nv-hi (God), and *u-ne-tla-nv-hi* (Creator) (Kilpatrik 29-31). Also, considering that all Tsalagi syllables end with a vowel sound (*v* has a *u* sound), *Mon-a-lah*, by hyphenation, cannot be Tsalagi (Kilpatrik 8). Other words which Carter uses that do not match Tsalagi patterns are *tal-con* (hawk), *tel-qui* (turkey), *ti-bi* (bee) and *pa-koh* (panther). All of these have syllables which do not end with vowel sounds, syllables and sounds that do not exist in Tsalagi (*b, ti, te, ko*), or both (Kilpatrik 6-7). Further, *tel-qui* has no relation to *Gu-na-ga-do-ga*, which is translated into English as Standing Turkey, a Cherokee Chief (Kilpatrik 43).

Clearly these words, which violate simple Tsalagi patterns of syllabication, are not representational of the Cherokee and, for what it matters, may not be Native American at all. I found no corresponding words in the more than fifteen dictionaries of various Native American languages in which I searched.

Another aspect of "Cherokee" culture on which Carter expounds in *The Education of Little Tree* is religion. In chapter eight, Little Tree's grandmother explains to him the nature of the spiritual world. She tells Little Tree that people have two minds: a body mind and a spirit mind. At death, she explains, the body mind dies with the body while the spirit mind is "born-back" into another body on earth. This idea of quasi-reincarnation is not at all representational of Cherokee religion.

Traditional Cherokee religion is based on harmony, balance,

order and sharing; and the concept of three worlds: the upper world above the sky, the human world, and the lower water world. If Cherokees maintained the proper harmony, balance and order in life, they believed that they would be blessed by the Great Spirits of the upper world. If not, the spirits of the lower world would rise out of caves and deep springs and cause chaos. The Cherokee also recognized the concept of the soul and believed that upon bodily death, if one had lived a harmonious life, the soul would go into a spirit world to be with the other souls who had led harmonious earthly lives. Those who did not live harmoniously on earth would receive an undetermined punishment after death (McLoughlin 18-22).

As early as 1794, however, the affects of Christian missionaries on Cherokee religion could already be seen. Of the six traditional Cherokee festivals, only two were regularly held after that year. In 1799, the first permanent Christian mission had been established in Cherokee territory (McLoughlin 13 and 24), and by 1829, little traditional Cherokee religion remained. In a interview published that same year in the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the newspaper of the New Echota Cherokee Nation, an elderly Cherokee warrior, who was old enough to remember the Revolutionary War, gives descriptions of "traditional" Cherokee ideas of creation that are very much mixed and confused with Christian/Biblical ideas (Kilpatrik 43-46). Therefore, whatever it is that Carter is presenting as Cherokee religion is not, as far as I can determine, representative of Cherokee beliefs before

or after the arrival of whites.

The last aspect of Cherokee tradition that Carter presents and that needs to be addressed is natural order, in particular hunting, farming and social practices. As mentioned before, the Cherokee believed in order, balance and harmony, considering every natural wonder to be sacred and to have meaning and significance. Thus, at least traditionally, Cherokee men were taught to kill only what they needed to survive. This idea, however, did not last. When the Cherokee learned that he could trade pelts to the white man for European commodities, tradition quickly became history. By 1794, the Cherokees had decimated their game herds for trade and were no longer able to provide for their families. They were forced to begin to use European farming techniques to prevent starvation (McLoughlin 15 and 19). In a plea to George Washington for aid, Chief Clear Sky said this:

> We must plant corn and raise cattle.... In former times we bought of traders goods cheap; we could then clothe our women and children; but now game is scarce and goods dear. We cannot live comfortably (McLoughlin 16).

Again, Carter's chapter-two description of "The Way," a system of conservation in hunting where only the weak and small are taken, is not very representative of Cherokee hunting practices either before or after the arrival of the whites. It is interesting, though, that Carter uses "The Way" to name the philosophy he presents. "The Way" is the Taoist/New Age religion practiced by Quai Chang King, the protagonist in the seventies television series *Kung Fu*, and I am reasonably sure that I have

heard Quai Chang mention nature taking only the small and weak so that the strong will reproduce. Perhaps this ties in with Carter's reincarnation philosophy of chapter eight.

There are two aspects of farming that need to be mentioned. The first is conservation. Traditionally, Cherokees did not till the land. They planted using wooden hoes that "barely scratched the surface" (McLoughlin 18). Plowing deeply into the Earth Mother as the white man did, or growing crops with the intent of selling them to others, was considered exploitation (McLoughlin 22). It was not until the Cherokees were brought to near starvation by the exploitation of the game herd that they began to adopt the white man's farming techniques, the deep plowing that led to massive erosion problems throughout the South by the 1930s (Culture 74). Therefore, although Carter tries to tie the use of mulch to Cherokee traditions of conservation, deep plowing of the Earth Mother cannot be considered Native American.

The other aspect of farming presented by Carter in *The Education of Little Tree* that is not representational of Cherokee life is the gender-role reversal. According to Cherokee tradition, the Creator specifically gave *Selu*, the first woman, the ability to provide maize and beans for her family, and consequently, women did all the farming. Women also had the tasks of gathering, tanning hides, making pottery and weaving baskets (McLoughlin 15-17). In fact, of the Black slaves that the Cherokees owned prior to 1800, most were purchased to lighten the workload for women (Halliburton 9). For a male to assume the

role of cultivator or gatherer was considered to be against the natural order and caused him to lose status in the community (McLoughlin 17). Yet, in *The Education of Little Tree*, it is the grandfather who does the farming, and both he and Little Tree often help the grandmother with gathering.

This leads to the topic of Cherokee social practices. As mentioned before, the traditional role of women was to be a cultivator, gatherer, weaver, potter and tanner. Basically, women were responsible for all domestic duties other than heavy chores (Halliburton 9). On the other hand, men were given by the Creator the ability and task of hunting and providing game for the family. This sexual division of labor was considered part of the sacred order and carried over into other areas of Cherokee life, so much so that men and women were believed to be two separate forms of humanity, the mixing of which led to chaos (McLoughlin 21). Thus, during the day women worked together in each other's households, and men held council in the town or common area or went on extended hunting trips. Indeed, "separation was the most important in activities which in their view [the Cherokees'] epitomized sexual identity" (McLoughlin 18). From this it can be seen that a man and woman in isolated living conditions sharing daily chores and activities is hardly representational of Cherokee life.

As a final note on Native Americans, it seems unlikely that a true Native American writer, one who had suffered the indignity of the derogatory comments often leveled at his race, would

choose the adjectives in the following passage to describe anything "Indian." "There was no fear, only exultation... Exultation that brought the rebel Indian yell rumbling from his chest and out his throat, screaming, savage" (Carter, F. 44).

If Cherokee customs and traditions are not the "truth" that Carter is presenting in his "true story," then perhaps Appalachian culture and traditions are. Indeed, much of the story portrays aspects of mountain culture. Little Tree's grandmother's herbal and folk remedies, for example, are very much a part of Appalachian life. Concoctions for inducing vomiting, as the grandmother caused the city men to do, are common (Rabun 70), as well as snake-bite remedies using birds. "Put the entrails of a freshly killed chicken on the area" (Rabun 65). In fact, *Foxfire 9*, a book in a series recording the dying Appalachian culture, lists not less than sixty-four categories of herbal and folk remedies intended to cure everything from aching feet to yellow jaundice (41-68). The same volume also has a chapter on log cabins that describes and gives the floor plan of a cabin very similar to the one Carter describes as Little Tree's home (413).

The use of hounds in *The Education of Little Tree* is also very representative of Appalachian life. For poor, rural Appalachians, the ownership of a good hound is very important in establishing a sense of self-worth and pride (Culture 379), not to mention a source of income. Also, "grandpa's trade," as moonshining is called in the book, is (or was in the thirties) a

well established tradition in Appalachia and is well described by Carter -- however ironic it is considering the high rate of alcoholism among Native Americans. The list continues. The distrust of outsiders, the backpacking salesman Mr. Wine, Pine Billy the fiddler, the reasoning, the entertainment, the paths through the mountains, the visits to church and the description of the land are all representations of Appalachian culture. At least, they are representations of the nicer side of Appalachian culture.

Unfortunately, there is another side to Appalachia. Those who dwelt in the inaccessible high mountains during the early parts of this century, as did Little Tree and his grandparents, were more often than not poor, uneducated, illiterate, ill-nourished, dirty, amoral, apathetic, people living in single-room, clay-floor, windowless cabins without water or fireplaces and perpetuating a culture based on the exploitation of women. The following is a 1935 description of the high Appalachian areas:

> It is here that the woman is the convenience of the man. She is a beast of burden. She totes the water for house use from the branch in the valley far below. She drags the timber in from the forest, chops the wood with which the food is cooked and the family warmed. She cuts the timber from the hillside, grubs the stumps and undergrowth, and plants and cultivates and harvests the corn which keeps her and the man to whom she is a slave and their brood from absolute starvation. She is illiterate... She is dirty and unkempt. She is ill-nourished and scrawny. She is stooped from the toil of the years since her early childhood, and wasted from much child bearing and from excessive sex demands of an undisciplined, unoccupied and sensual man. Her clothing is scant and vile and often in rags. She is aged and broken before she is thirty: to the causal observer she is fifty or more. (Culture 387)

Although this description may be a bit extreme and cannot represent all high-mountain families, it does at least expose a side of Appalachian culture that is not presented in *The Education of Little Tree*. Thus, although Carter's book does present some of the cultural tradition of Appalachia, it cannot be considered truly representational.

But where is the "truth"? If the book is not about Cherokee culture, and it is not about Appalachian culture, what is left? The answer to this question is perhaps too obvious, too ridiculous. The answer is exactly what everyone thought it was in the beginning -- only now the candy-coating has been taken away. The "truth" in this story is Forrest Carter. It must be.

To begin with, the religion presented in *The Education of Little Tree* cannot be anything other than Carter's own. It is not Cherokee, it is not Appalachian, and it is not Southern. Carter would have no purpose in allotting such a large space in the book to the discussion of spirituality if he was not intent on passing these beliefs to the reader, and it is not logical that one would desire to perpetuate the beliefs of another.

Along similar lines of reasoning, the social/cultural system of beliefs that Carter presents in *The Education of Little Tree* must also be his own, although they are strongly representative of Southern and Appalachian culture. As Dan T. Carter notes, it is obvious from all of Carter's writing, both Asa's and Forrest's, that he has a strong loyalty to friends and family and a distrust of outsiders:

> [T]here are threads that stretch from Asa Carter's racist pamphlets to his new-age novels of the Native Americans: We live unto ourselves. We trust no one outside the circle of blood kin and closest comrades. We have no responsibilities outside that closed circle. Government and all its agencies are corrupt. Politics is a lie. (Carter,D.)

I also believe that the relationship between man and nature presented in *The Education of Little Tree* is an idea that Carter intended to pass to the reader. The reason for this is that, being from the rural South as Carter was, I understand the importance that land holds for the Southerner. It must be remembered that the South was settled originally by "land lovers" because it was environmentally superior for agriculture (Culture 52-53). Perhaps this idea is better explained by the opening paragraphs of Ferrol Sams' *Run with the Horsemen*, a Southern Bildungsroman:

> In the beginning was the land. Shortly thereafter was the father. The boy knew this with certainty. It was knowledge that was in his marrow. It predated memory and conscious thought as surely as hunger and thirst. He could not have explained it, but he knew it.
>
> The father owned the land. He plowed it, harvested it, timbered it and hunted over it. It was his. Before that it had been the land of his father and his father's father. Before that it had belonged to the Indians, who since Creation had held it by God's will in trust for the family, just waiting until it could be claimed by its rightful owners.
>
> The boy knew all this. No one told him. He also knew that in turn the land owned his father. Everything the father did eventually revolved around nurture of the land. Without the land there would be no family. The ungodly were not so and lived in town. They were like chaff which the wind bloweth away. Their feet were not rooted in the soil, and they were therefore of little consequence in the scheme of things. (Sams 1)

Perhaps Carter somehow knew when he wrote *The Education of Little Tree* that his life was nearing its end. I cannot know.

But, what I find in this book is a man looking back over his life, deciding what is important, and presenting this to his readers. In a sense, what Carter has done is give the reader his philosophy on the three types of relationships that every person will encounter in life: spiritual, human and environmental. These are the previously-mentioned "profound truths" that Carter believed his audience needed to know.

One might wonder at this point why, if Carter did indeed have these "profound truths" to offer to the reader, was it necessary for him to use Native Americans and Appalachians as a vehicle to carry his ideas. Simply put, Carter is a rhetorician. This is obvious from his past experiences as a radio announcer, Ku Klux Klan leader, and speech writer for George Wallace. Even more, he is Southern, and every Southern storyteller (rhetorician) knows that a message is often better received when candy-coated. This can be seen not only in *The Education of Little Tree* overall, but both inside and outside of the story as well. Inside, there is the snake-bite incident which Carter uses to present a story from Grandpa's childhood. Because I am a amateur herpetologist and have had the unpleasant experience of being bitten by a rattlesnake, it is obvious to me that this part of the story is not true. The venom of the Timber Rattler, the only rattlesnake native to Tennessee that would fit Carter's description (Ernst), is a hemotoxin which destroys blood and tissue cells. While a loss of blood cells could very well put Little Tree's grandfather into a coma, it is unlikely that it

would cause delirium and hallucinations. Further, the amount of necrotic tissue resulting from the type of bite Carter describes and the wounds the grandfather self-inflicts while attempting to rid himself of venom would more than likely lead to blood poisoning, if not gangrene, without modern medical attention and could very well cause the loss of a hand or death (Ernst 116). It is ludicrous to think that Grandpa got up the next morning, "skinned the rattler," and was only "a little weak-kneed" (Carter, F. 113). Yet, for the average reader, this is a fascinating, believable and effective way to introduce an otherwise out-of-place story from Grandpa's youth.

An example of Carter's rhetorical prowess from outside the text is his own name. He knew that his books would sell better with an environmental/New Age name like "Forrest" which did not link him to his past. It is, however, ironic that it does to a degree link him with the Ku Klux Klan whose founder was Nathan Bedford Forrest.

As for "Cherokee Culture" being used as a vehicle for the presentation of ideas, Carter had several good reasons for doing this. First, since the late sixties there has been an increasing national interest in Native American culture. This can be seen in the number of copies of *The Education of Little Tree* sold and the willingness of Americans to accept anything written about Native Americans as fact. Second, there is a Southern nostalgia for Native Americans. Southerners believe that Native Americans hold a very important place in their history. This can be seen

in the quote from *Run with the Horsemen*. Although it is condescending, this passage establishes the Native American as the link between the Southerner and the land. Carter himself had this nostalgia. As his editor once said, "He [Carter] always said he was a white man with Indian blood" (Reid 18).

This, of course, raises the question of how Carter, a Ku Klux Klanner, could be nostalgic about Native Americans. The answer is that the Ku Klux Klan does not consider Native Americans to be a racial group needing to be held in their place. There are several reasons for this. First, although the Cherokee Nation originally covered more than 40,000 square miles of the South (McLoughlin 14), there are now only five federal Indian reservations in the South which together have a total land area of less than 300 square miles (Indian Lands). What this means is that most Southerners never have contact with Native Americans, and if they do, it is usually in a tourist setting. Second, there is the issue of nostalgia which has already been discussed. And third, because there was a shortage of white women during the settling of the South, many white men took Cherokee wives (McLoughlin 25). Consequently, many in the South have Cherokee in their bloodline.

Looking through Ku Klux Klan history, I was only able to find one altercation between the Klan and Native Americans. In 1958, a local Klan group in Robeson County, North Carolina skirmished with the Lumbee Indians of that area. The unorganized Klanners were swiftly defeated. However, in 1966, only eight

years after the confrontation, the Grand Dragon of the Robeson County Klanners invited the Lumbees to join their organization. There were no takers (Newton 358).

Similar to Cherokee culture, there is a national interest in the backwardness of Appalachia. This can be seen in television programs and movies, such as *The Beverly Hillbillies, Deliverance* and *Nell*. It is more likely, however, that Carter used Appalachia as a vehicle for presenting his ideas in *The Education of Little Tree* because of his affection for mountain people. In fact, Carter's insistence that "the mountain people -- the real redneck -- is our strength" (Newton 100) is what caused him to leave the Alabama Citizens Council, a white-collar version of the Ku Klux Klan, in 1954 and form The Original Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy (Newton 100).

Elizabeth Hadas, director of the University of New Mexico Press, announced in 1991 that the press intended to remove the words "true story" from the cover of upcoming editions of *The Education of Little Tree*, and I have heard from colleagues that this has indeed happened. I think this is unfortunate. The mistake made with this book is a failure to understand the culture of the author; it is not that the author has attempted to fool the reader. This book is indeed a "true story" in the Southern sense of the phrase, and Forrest/Asa Earl Carter, aside from the crimes he committed in his earlier life, is indeed a true storyteller.

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